

**What Are We Asking People to
Be Ready For?**

**Rewriting the Rules of
Engagement Through Harm
Reduction**



Objectives:



Rethink Systemic Expectations of “Readiness”



**Prioritize Dignity and Principles of Harm
Reduction**



Gain the tools needed to shift practices

**What does it
mean to be
ready in the
context of your
work?**



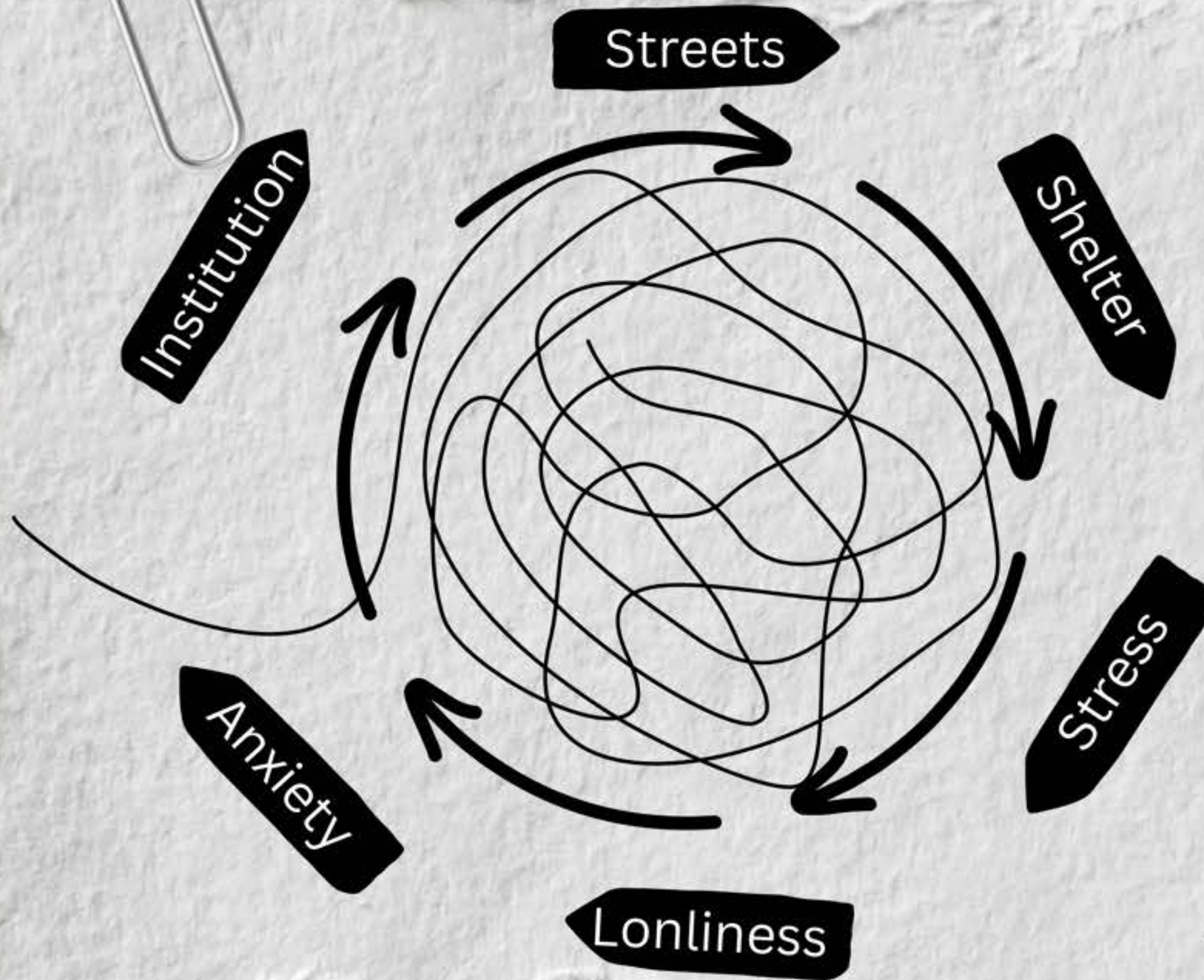
Rethinking

Readiness

- Must be sober for X number of days before being housed
- Must complete treatment to be eligible for services
- Employment before housing eligibility
- Vital documents before intake
- Curfews to hold a bed



Cycle of Exclusion





participant impact

- Stress & Anxiety
- Frustration
- Provider Mistrust
- Unrealistic Goals



principles of harm reduction

Ensures individuals who use drugs or have a history of use have a voice in developing relevant programs and policies.

Acknowledges that poverty, class, racism, social isolation, trauma, sex-based discrimination, and other social inequalities impact individuals' vulnerability to and ability to manage drug-related harm.

Empowers people who use drugs (PWUD) to take charge of harm reduction, encouraging them to share information and support each other based on their actual conditions of use.

Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real and tragic harm and danger that can be associated with illicit drug use

Recognizes that drug use is a reality and aims to reduce its harmful effects rather than impose punitive measures. to minimize harmful consequences and not punishment

Defines the quality of individual and community life and well-being—not solely the elimination of all drug use—as the measure for effective interventions and policies.

Recognizes drug use as a complex phenomenon with a range of behaviors from severe use to total abstinence, and acknowledges that some methods of drug use are safer than others.

Calls for providing non-judgmental, non-coercive services and resources to drug users and their communities to help reduce harm.

Applying the principles

- Advocate for inclusive housing for everyone, removing obstacles such as prerequisites like “clean time” or mandated treatment.
- Celebrate progress in every journey, understanding that personal growth can take many forms and isn’t always straightforward.
- Offer tailored support that truly aligns with each participant's unique needs.
- Normalize harm reduction resources, recognizing essentials like naloxone and safer-use kits as integral components of a holistic approach to care.





Systems exclude people who need them the most

My Lived Experience





**What aspects of your work could
be seen as exclusionary?**

Building Systems Ready for All



Design with flexibility,
compassion,
understanding, and
kindness for everyone
involved



Acknowledge that
drug use is a part of
the human
experience



Prioritize dignity and
humanity as essential
values that cannot be
compromised

The background of the slide is a soft, abstract watercolor wash in various shades of pink and light purple, creating a textured, artistic feel.

CALL TO ACTION!

Stop waiting for participants to adapt to the system; inspire change by building systems that embrace and support everyone.

In Closing

- Rewrite rules of engagement, rooted in dignity, flexibility, and harm reduction.
- Examine intake language and program policies that unintentionally exclude or punish people who use drugs or live outside.
- Commit to practical changes (e.g., housing retention tools, reducing exits back to homelessness, providing low-barrier supports) that honor people's humanity, no matter where they are on the human spectrum.
- Take concrete steps in your practice or organization to make services more welcoming and less conditional.



“
When we stop asking if people
are ready, and start making our
systems ready for them, we
don't just reduce harm, we
create belonging, we build
trust, and we save lives.
”



Maggie Luna

Executive Director
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